

Conspiracy of Silence

Category: Palliative and Hospice Care

written by Astra Chang-Ramsden | July 28, 2025

When I was little, my mother would tell me that not everything I am thinking should be said. Years later, in November 2023, it became apparent to me that my father was dying, and I said so. I said it to everybody: my parents, my brothers, my extended family. I told them that David, my daddy, is dying. People watched me in shock. Nobody believed me.

How could you call death on your father? What gives you the right to say so? Well, I say, it's the wheels turning in my head from ten-plus years of hospice work under my belt. It's not like I can turn it off, or unknow what I know.

My mother was in denial, blaming it on his thyroid, and then his heart, and then she said he's not trying hard enough to eat. She made soups, she mashed everything, she wore out the blender. She even made blended salad! But he continued to lose weight. They tried hyperbaric therapy. They tried antibiotics. Someone wanted to send us deep south to Moruga to see a homeopathic doctor for a miracle therapy. My Auntie offered to send them to Florida for a second opinion. Someone wanted to put in a PEG tube and feed him up, thinking this would get him well enough for surgery.

All the while my father complained that he no longer had dignity or purpose. He had to stop working because he couldn't focus. He stopped preaching because his voice was weak. He stopped going out because his back hurt all the time. He worried that the money would run out and that he and Mummy would be living in the streets. He thought that the Canadian tax authorities would come and seize all his assets. When it rained he worried about the roof leaking in new spots and he made Mummy cut back on the housekeeper and gardener because he didn't think they could get by. The questions and constant anxiety have been driving his housemates crazy.

I tried to get him to respite at a hospice, and I paid for hospice nurses to come to the home. I've spoken to GP's, endocrinology, cardiology, gerontology, gastroenterology, maxillofacial, dietitians, physiotherapy, psychiatry, palliative care, chaplains, pastors, bankers, and lawyers. I've done everything I can think of to do. Still no one wants to talk about dying. To discuss the very real possibility that David has only eight-to-twelve weeks of life remaining.

I would be surprised if we see Christmas 2025, and I know this year was my last Father's Day. My bones tell me this is the last hoorah, and that it's time to do legacy work and tell David that I love him. All the while my mother can't decide if it's time to move to her new house, and trying to clean and pack up the old, big house. It's the continued conspiracy of silence as no one is able to say, David is dying.

Astra Chang-Ramsden

Cascade, Trinidad and Tobago